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Sunny 33°/14° See **2A**

# The Charlotte Observer

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# Partisans begin seeking to exploit harassment claims

BY KENNETH P. VOGEL
*The New York Times*

WASHINGTON

As the #MeToo movement to expose sexual harassment roils the nation's capital, political partisans are exploiting the moment, raising hundreds of thousands of dollars to support accusers who come forward with charges against President Donald Trump and members of Congress, even amid questions about their motivation.

Harvey Weinstein

Bill O'Reilly

As accusations take on a partisan tint, activists and lawyers fear that such an evolution could damage a movement that has shaken Hollywood, Silicon Valley, media suites in New York and the hallways of Congress – and has taken down both a Democratic fundraiser, Harvey Weinstein, and a conservative stalwart, Bill O'Reilly.

"There is a danger in this environment that unsophisticated individuals who have been abused by powerful people could be exploited by groups seeking partisan advantage, or by lawyers seeking a moment in the limelight," said Debra Katz, a Washington lawyer who has brought sexual harassment cases against politicians from both parties.

The lawyers and operatives behind the most politically charged cases brush off those concerns.

"I approach this with a pure heart," said Jack Burkman, a flamboyant Republican lawyer known for right-wing conspiracy theories who is seeking to represent sexual harassment victims. "I don't want to see it politicized, even though, in a democracy, you see the political weaponization of everything."

Gloria Allred, a high-profile women's rights lawyer and Democratic donor, is raising money to fund a lawsuit against Trump by a woman who says he sexually assaulted her. The woman, Summer Zervos, has filed a defamation suit against the president that could force Trump to respond to sexual

SEE HARASSMENT, 3A

LOCAL

## WOMEN'S MARCH YEAR II PLANNED

The participants in 2017's Women's March plan a reprise on the Jan. 20 anniversary. **4A**

NATION & WORLD

## DEPUTY KILLED, 4 WOUNDED

A suspect is believed killed after ambushing officers called to scene of domestic dispute. **8A**

SPORTS

## TIDE AND TIGERS FACE OFF AGAIN

Well-honed defenses might hold the Sugar Bowl between Clemson and Alabama to a lower score than past games. **3B**

DAVID T. FOSTER III dtfoster@charlotteobserver.com

Carolina Panthers quarterback Cam Newton (1) throws downfield against Atlanta on Sunday. Newton threw three interceptions in a 22-10 loss to the Falcons. The defeat meant that the Panthers will travel to New Orleans for a playoff game Sunday.

COMMENTARY

# *Panthers could have had a prettier playoff picture*

**Wild-card playoffs**

CAROLINA AT NEW ORLEANS

Sunday, Jan. 7, 4:40 p.m.

BY SCOTT FOWLER
*sfowler@charlotteobserver.com*

ATLANTA

If the Carolina Panthers play like that again, their stay in the upcoming NFL playoffs will be nasty, brutish and short.

The Atlanta Falcons throttled Carolina 22-10 Sunday in Georgia, and the defeat meant the Panthers took a golden opportunity for a home playoff game and turned it into pig iron.

Because of Sunday's loss, the Panthers must now travel to New Orleans for a 4:40 p.m. kickoff Sunday against a Saints team that has already beaten them twice this season.

It's far from ideal. Given Sunday's other results, a Carolina victory over Atlanta would have pushed the Panthers from a No. 5 seed to a No. 3, provided another NFC South championship trophy and earned Carolina a home playoff game in the first round (it would have been against Atlanta – again).

But instead, Cam Newton threw nine incompletions in a row to start the game and later fired three interceptions in one of the most miserable games of his career. The Panthers never led and never really looked like they had much of a chance.

Then again, it's worth standing back for a moment and realizing that for Panthers fans, this could all be a lot worse. Yes, the team's 81-year-old owner is embroiled in an NFL investigation and has announced his intention to sell the team. And the Panthers fell flat on their helmets Sunday.

But at this time last year, the Panthers had just completed a

SEE PANTHERS, 3A

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